8. (New) A method for producing *in vitro* the RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity encoded by hepatitis C virus (HCV), comprising the step of incubating together HCV NS5B, ribonucleotide substrates, and a RNA template, under conditions suitable to produce said RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity, provided that said incubating takes place *in vitro*.

9. (New) The method of claim 8, wherein said NS5B is purified.

10. (New) The method of claim 9, wherein said NS5B has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.

11. (New) The method of claim 8, wherein said NS5B is produced from a NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein by means of multiple proteolytic events that occur in an organism expressing nucleic acid encoding said NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein, followed by purification of said NS5B.

12. (New) A method for identifying a HCV RNA-dependent RNA polymerase inhibitor comprising:

(a) incubating *in vitro* a composition comprising HCV NS5B, ribonucleotide substrates, an RNA template, and a test compound, under conditions suitable to produce NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity in the absence of said compound; and

(b) measuring the ability of said compound to affect said NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

13. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein said NS5B is the only HCV protein present during said incubating.

14. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein said method measures primer independent RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

15. (New) The method of claim 13, wherein said method measures primer independent RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

16. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein said NS5B is purified.

17. (New) The method of 12, wherein said NS5B has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.

18. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein said NS5B is produced from a NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein by means of multiple proteolytic events that occur in an organism expressing nucleic acid encoding said NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein, followed by purification of said NS5B.

19. (New) The method of claim 13, wherein said NS5B is provided as an extract of an organism expressing nucleic acid encoding said NS5B.